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Report of Bribe To Thurmond Being Probed

The Justice Department is conducting an extremely sensitive investigation of Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The investigation centers on statements by a man who claims he saw Thurmond accept at least \$20,000 handed over by a middleman acting for renegade CIA agent and convicted arms smuggler Edwin P. Wilson.

In a personal meeting with me, the senator vehemently denied the allegation.

He acknowledged that he knew the purported middleman.

But he said no bribe offer was even so much as discussed.

Wilson also denied through his lawyer that he ever bribed any member of Congress.

He is now in federal custody.

He was brought to trial and convicted on charges of conspiring to ship 20 tons of plastic explosives to Libya.

In fact, a source close to Wilson said that during the ex-CIA agent's plea bargaining Justice Department

officials brought up the allegation of a Thurmond bribe, and indicated that things might go easier on Wilson if he agreed to testify in such a case.

"If he had known anything, that was the time for him to say it," the source pointed out. But Wilson stuck to his denial.

I first learned in September, 1981, that Justice was looking into a related allegation that one man had offered Thurmond's services—for a price—to Frank Terpil, a Wilson associate who is still a fugitive.

That investigation hinged on testimony of Kevin Mulcahy, a government witness who died last October.

Before he died, Mulcahy told my associate Dale Van Atta that he had been with the middleman and Terpil in 1976 when the possibility of a bribe to Thurmond was discussed.

The purpose of the meetings, Mulcahy said, was to figure out a way to get Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi the eight C130 transport planes Libya had purchased.

They were embargoed by the State Department because of the dictator's support of international terrorists.

Terpil had been offered a \$1 million commission for each plane delivered.

Mulcahy said the middleman suggested getting Thurmond's help, at which Terpil offered the man a commission of \$250,000 per plane—and

an equal sum for the senator if he cooperated.

When we asked about these charges in September, 1981, the middleman denied taking part in any such discussion.

The man did acknowledge that he had "been approached by probably three or four different people on those C130s."

In the semi-related case now under investigation, the new witness, in a sworn statement, says a middleman "would regularly come to the [Arlington, Va.] office of Delex International Inc., a Wilson-sponsored company."

He has told government officials that on at least two occasions this middleman took \$10,000 cash in an envelope to a meeting with Thurmond, and that the envelope was turned over to the senator, "whom I know by sight."

The witness added that he did not know what the payment was for.

This particular middleman told Van Atta he was a social, but not a business, acquaintance of Wilson.

But a letter he wrote last Aug. 2 to the Judiciary Committee's chief investigator suggests a closer relationship to Wilson than he admitted.

In the letter, which Thurmond immediately turned over to the FBI, the middleman wrote of Wilson:

"I consider him a friend that I have known for about 10 years."